

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, VETERANS AFFAIRS,
AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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May 8, 2006

The Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Room 3E880
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Our Congressional Delegation recently returned from a fact-finding trip to Baghdad, Ramadi and other Middle Eastern cities. The purpose of my twelfth trip was to continue oversight assessing political and governmental developments, training and equipping of Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Iraq reconstruction. As with my earlier trips, this letter provides my observations and recommendations.

Despite setbacks—such as the length of time it took Iraqis to select a prime minister and the ongoing violence, including the bombing of the Al-Askari mosque in Samarra—I am hopeful about the future of Iraq. There are clear signs democracy is taking hold, sectarian violence is being contained and Iraqi military,

border patrol and police are assuming more and more of the daily security responsibilities.

Observation: The Sunni and Kurd rejection of the Shia prime minister candidate (Dr. Ibrahim al-Jaafari) and the eventual acceptance of a new Shia candidate (PM Designate Nouri al-Maliki) is an encouraging sign democracy is beginning to work, that majority rule cannot run over minority rights. While this accomplishment alone will not stop the violence, it builds a bridge between Iraqi factions. The Iraqis are beginning to learn that while the majority rules the minorities have rights.

Recommendation: It is essential we not give the impression Iraq can form a government overnight. Americans should understand Iraqis are not only selecting ministers to run their government, they are also negotiating peace among themselves. At the same time we should explain to Iraqi politicians they do not have the luxury to negotiate endlessly. Cabinet ministers must be selected this month so a government begins to function in earnest.

Additionally, I support the recommendation of the Comptroller General of the United States that the Iraqis need more capacity-building assistance of a civilian nature, and that the assistance needs to come not just from the United States but also from others in the international community, particularly Western Europe.

Observation: The Iraqi Security Forces, including the police, border patrol and military, are continuing to expand, improve and replace Coalition Forces. They will eventually become a formidable force. However, for the foreseeable future, they will continue to need logistical support including resupply of food and fuels, medical services and air support. Additionally, a Coalition Force presence will be necessary to defend the country against external threats.

Recommendation: The American public should be better informed of the progress being made developing Iraqi forces. At the same time we should explain why Coalition Forces will remain in Iraq for the foreseeable future—to ensure this young representative government is not toppled from within and is protected from external threats. American citizens need to know continued funding to improve and sustain Iraq is essential.

Observation: Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) are designed to transfer diplomats, military personnel and aid workers out of Baghdad and place them in provinces working with Iraqis. They assist the regional governments by promoting the rule of law and supporting economic development. The teams are now staffed primarily by personnel from the Departments of State and Defense and the US Agency for International Development. Four teams have been established, and several additional teams are being formed. Staffing and funding these teams has become problematic.

Recommendation: We should expand the staffing effort for these teams by assigning personnel from other agencies such as the Departments of Justice, Agriculture and Transportation, and seek participation from the international community. Additional funding is also necessary to increase the number of teams.

Observation: While in the Middle East the Congressional Delegation also traveled to the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Israel. Leaders in these countries provided us with one overriding message—we must not fail in Iraq, the United States should not withdraw from Iraq prematurely.

Recommendation: I am convinced premature withdrawal will guarantee failure. We should replace our withdrawal mindset with the recognition of what our military, diplomats and others have accomplished, as well as the sacrifices made by the people of Iraq to grasp hold of democracy and live a better life. Recognizing what we have accomplished will help sustain us through this difficult effort.

Observation: It was also pointed out to the Congressional Delegation, while in the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Israel, that Iran has a vested interest in a weak but centralized Iraqi government. Iran does not want Iraq divided because it is concerned not only about a separate Kurdish state, and believes some Shia Arabs within Iran would want to join a Shia state in Iraq.

Recommendation: This insight by Middle Eastern leaders should help us understand Iranian motives and should be factored into our deliberations and future planning.

If you or your staff have any questions please contact me at 202-225-5541, or Dr. R. Nicholas Palarino, my Subcommittee Staff Director, at 202-225-2548, who has accompanied me on all of my trips to Iraq.

Sincerely,

Christopher Shays
Chairman